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SANDY

I MADE Sandy's acquaintance at a village in Essex through which flows a small river beloved of those who are not too proud to practice coarse fishing. Some cottage gardens slope down to the river, and on the low banks Sandy, with his face near the water, lay watching the dace, perch, and roach moving in the entrancing submarine avenues among the water plants. Directly I entered the garden, by coming through the house, nothing existed for me but Sandy—though the garden was undoubtedly pretty. He lay in the sun like a piece of gleaming amber on green velvet. As I approached him he never withdrew his eyes from the ghostly forms that slid about beneath the surface of the river. Every now and then he would extend his right fore-paw, which, like his other paws and his breast, was as white as snow, towards the fish and draw it back again. While this motion was being performed I noticed that he curved his leg and paw towards his body, as though he meant to claw a fish on the far side and jerk it towards him on the bank. But he never proceeded further than this symbolical movement, of which the phantoms below were probably unaware, as the sun was on the other side of the river and no shadow was cast. At each dab forward with his paw he seemed to say to the fish: "You are all mine." I extend my paw over you in token of ownership. But after all, you are some way down, and on this particular occasion it isn't worth while to get wet. Perhaps at the next dab—or if not then, perhaps some day. Who knows? What has a cat to do

but sit and wait?" He proclaimed himself by all his movements a leisurely cat of comfortable habits and cautious but sure judgments. I picked him up, and he instantly purred such a deep, rich, resounding purr as I had ever before heard. His whole body vibrated with the expression of his content. "What do you think of him?" asked the tenant of the cottage. "I think," I said, "he's one of the nicest cats I ever saw." "Quite a common cat," commented the man. "I know, I like common cats. I don't care about Persians." "You can have him." This dramatic turn to the conversation would have made a hesitating response seem weak. You cannot temporize with a man who disburses cats without a moment's warning. If, on the one hand, his method was Oriental in acting on the principle that the quest must be offered all that he admires, on the other hand, there was an unmistakable genuineness in his voice. At all events I must decide on the spot. So I accepted Sandy.

Sandy had the most engaging personality I have ever known in a cat. I cannot easily explain this, for his character was not altogether heroic; but at any moment of a long friendship I would have said that I could have much better have spared a better cat. To sit in a room with him was to enjoy a rest cure. He never worried about anything—except when he was shut up in a basket. He was not always in the mood for conversation, and as often as not when I had a proposal to make to him I found that his tastes differed from mine, as to

the desirability, for example, of going for a walk or as to the flavour of some food which I was willing to share with him. To set this down in writing seems like saying that he was unresponsive. But he was not; the likeability of his personality did not depend upon his complaisance or his cleverness. It was much more elusive than that. When he was in one's company there was an atmosphere of comfort and good-will. I liked to know that he was in a room with me, just as I like to know that some persons are in a room with me, although if I were to recount their attractions these would seem to be inferior in point of intelligence and accomplishment to those of other persons with whose company I can joyfully dispense. Sandy's peculiar character in his new country home came out in impressive contrast with the tribal character of four black cats which my wife and I also owned. Sandy and they differed as much in temperament as they did in bodily presence. Sandy was large, and his broad flat back seemed to be designed so that he could lie on it with his legs sticking up in the air, like an inverted table—a favorite posture with him. The black cats (three sisters and their mother) were small, lean, and restless. Never was such a sporting family. They were death on rats, and while they were still kittens killed rats as large as themselves. Muffie, the mother, took their sporting education in hand as soon as they were large enough to be brought down the dangerous sloping roof from the loft, where they had been born. No amount of food would make them bigger or fatter. Their tails were long and lank as befitted such lean huntswomen, but you would not have said that they were ugly tails if you had seen them lashing with excitement when the cats were making ready to pounce,

or balancing the swift agile bodies when the cats dashed up trees like squirrels, or curved round a bend in the garden like race-horses swinging round Tottenham Corner. The three daughters were commonly known as the Mowlies, and answered to that name in a group. They were almost quite indistinguishable from each other, and though they had separate names these were seldom used even by those who knew them apart. Their instincts were all violent and primitive. They lived for war and love, and knew no milder emotions.

Cats may be divided into two classes: personal cats and non-personal cats. The first class consists of those which live in drawing-rooms and dining rooms and are in daily converse with men. The second class are kitchen cats—though it must be admitted, since no rule is absolute, that a kitchen cat is personal to the cook—and stable cats. The stories to the discredit of cats in general are all founded on the escapades of non-personal cats. But the Mowlies belonged in an odd way to both classes. They lived in the stable but they were extraordinarily forthcoming to those whom they trusted. It was a sight to see the mistress of the house step onto the lawn and call the Mowlies. From shrubbery, tree, or outhouse four little black devils would dart with the speed of light. If there was food they wanted it, no matter what it was; if a walk was suggested, it was exactly what suited them. They had the simple logic of dogs who say: "A walk? Of course. I'm ready—naturally." Now Sandy, who was a personal cat, had all the sophistication of his position. He would not jump at a walk as a matter of course. He deliberately weighed the advantages and disadvantages and would come to a leisurely decision according to

his summing up of the situation. First of all he wanted to know whether the grass was wet. Not that he minded wet grass in the early morning, because then a small rabbit might as likely as not be lying out. But he did not consider wet grass to be good enough later in the day when there was hardly any chance of a rabbit. Then he would want to know what dogs were going. One or two of the puppies he did not mind, but he drew the line at the yellow collie, whom he hated. If he decided that a walk was unequivocally desirable, he would lead the procession across the fields, no one enjoying himself more. But if there were too many dogs, or if the yellow collie were of the party or if it were simply that his mood was out of tune with the rest of us, he would walk behind. To show that he was not in a bad temper he would nearly always come a short way, but he would fall further and further behind and then turn and saunter home alone. The Mowlies were invariably good for almost any distance, provided that the way lay across fields and away from habitations; they would not go on high roads or near houses. When Sandy and the Mowlies hunted on their own account their differences were quite as marked. The Mowlies were incorrigible poachers and as their enterprise was entirely without discretion we knew what their end would be. They were curiously unself-regarding cats. There is a kind of gallantry that will not bring a man or animal to disaster unless he has bad luck; and there is another kind of gallantry that will certainly bring a man or an animal to his death unless remarkable good luck saves him. Some men and animals seem born to be killed. The Mowlies belonged to this class, and within two years the mother and her three daughters disappeared never to

be seen or heard of again. Any game-keeper would have told us from the first moment that that was bound to be the end of them. But though strictly preserved coverts were all round us, Sandy never disappeared for a single day. He never even got a foot in a trap. When he was not under our supervision he confined his hunting to the garden. He knew a place where a rabbit-run crossed a corner of the garden, and here he would often kill a small rabbit. He would bury what he could not eat at one sitting, and return frequently to the spot of interment to make sure that the prospective meal had not been discovered. At last we gave up being anxious about Sandy. We knew that he would never be caught out. He had plainly said to himself with perfect self-appreciation and candour: "I may not kill rats, but I am liked and admired. I am an important member of this household. It is obviously necessary that my life should be preserved." And he never was caught out—at least not until one day But that remains to be told.

In the winter Sandy was generally brought to London. The first journey is possibly still remembered by the staff of the railway. The maids who had charge of him asked if he might travel in their carriage. The guard said: "No, certainly not. It's against the rules." Sandy was accordingly put in the guard's van. Now if Sandy had a rich and resonant purr, his shriek of despair was still more striking. It was incessant and blood-curdling as long as his annoyance lasted. Above the rattle of the train Sandy's cries went through the guard's head till he could hold out no longer. At the first stopping-place—seventy minutes from the start—he brought the basket to the maid's carriage. He was

long past the stage of caring for the rules. "Here," he said, "you can have that cat. I'm done with him." In London, which he liked quite as much as the country, Sandy at once made great friends with the police. One policeman who used to stand near our front door was kind to him, and afterwards Sandy would always run to the blue uniform. How many lonely spells of police duty he beguiled at night we could never estimate, but the gratitude of the police was often expressed. The Mowlies, for want of gamekeepers' traps, would have died of boredom in London within a few weeks, but Sandy's adaptability was perfect. In one respect his character was wholly virtuous, and this fact must be given full weight in any honest biography. He would put up with almost any amount of pulling about and reasonably friendly tormentings from children. He adored them, and laid himself out to amuse them. Directly the voices of children were heard in the drawing-room after tea, Sandy would come rushing up from the dining room, where he used to sleep in the afternoons. He would allow himself to be dressed up without protest, and look very important and much pleased when everybody laughed. A dog can never bear being laughed at, but Sandy felt that his contribution to the fun was essential, and therefore personally creditable and meritorious. Sometimes, if the game became too rough, he would ask to be let out of the room by pawing the door. But if the children continued to play without him, his curiosity or benevolence would always conquer him,

and cry to be readmitted to receive, in Shakespeare's words, the pinch "that hurts but is desired." His greatest exhibition of curiosity, however, was excited by a game of Patience which a small boy used to play on the floor, stretched at full length. After watching the cards being pushed about one day, Sandy said to himself: "I can do that too." He then began to push the cards about with his paw. Afterwards Patience used to be played rather for the sake of Sandy than for the sake of the game. He never failed to come up to the scratch for a game of Patience.

The death of Sandy was a tragic irony. Having evaded all the snares of the coverts in the country, he met his end in the safe streets of London, and not many yards away, as we believe, from a friendly policeman. The only evidence on the subject came from a maid. Said she: "I heard the postman ring, and I went up to get the letters. Sandy was at the door. It was half past eight (in the evening). When I opened the door to see if the postman had any parcels Sandy ran out." There was nothing in that. He had a rendezvous with the policeman, and ran out every evening. But he was never seen again. It was said that other cats in our street disappeared that night. . . . The furriers were said to be in want of fur for cheap stoles. The suggestion may be pure slander. But if anyone is wearing Sandy she wears something that I would willingly have bought back alive for much money.

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